

**OFFICERS QUARTERS**

(Castillo De San Christobal, Officers Quarters)  
San Juan National Historic Site  
Boulevard Norzagaray  
San Juan  
San Juan County  
Puerto Rico

**HABS NO. PR-98**

HABS  
PR  
7-SAJU,  
49-

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
P.O. BOX 37127  
WASHINGTON D.C. 20013-7127

ADDENDUM  
1-15-93

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Location: Boulevard Norzagaray, San Juan, Puerto Rico

Present Owners: U.S. National Park Service

### Historic Information:

The structure is one of three enclosing the Plaza de Armas, high above street level of old San Juan to the west and the Atlantic Ocean below to the east. The plaza is reached by a wide curving ramp up from Norzagaray Blvd.. The original Officers Quarters consisted of five vaulted casemates built in 1775, to which was added in 1861 the wing now equipped as showers and toilets. They are built above five large cisterns which also extend under Plaza de Armas, resulting in a two story elevation on the west front facing the city. The character today is essentially determined by the 1861 addition and renovations which included closing the open portico before the casemates and the addition of the circular bath structure. The sandstone piers of the portico are now expressed as engaged pilasters which express the five casemates on the east front. There is no such articulation of the east wall of the 1861 addition. An even greater contrast between the two sections may be found on the west front. Here the original section projects as a monumental pavilion with engaged 40'-0" pilasters framing an arcade at ground level and the ornamented single windows in each bay on the second level. The entablature above breaks out above the pilasters and also over each window. The wall terminates in a simple panelized parapet. By contrast, the west wall of the 1861 addition, set back and resting on the massive battered wall as its base, reads as a single story with unadorned walls, unequally spaced windows and unexpressed parapet.

Today the structure stands in generally sound structural condition. Other than one wood lintel failure and rotted wood beams in the present transformer room, there is no discernible structural failure in any of the masonry construction. The most obvious defects occur in the interior and exterior plaster finish and in the rotted wood trim at the openings. Plaster failures range from slight scaling and spalling to complete breaks which leave raw brick and sandstone exposed. The latter condition is notably true on the west wall of the 1861 addition. The flat brick roof over the casemates, if not original, is of a type similar to the period. It appears to be in good condition. The modern tile roof over the addition is likewise sound.

Architectural Information:

The plan consists of two contiguous blocks, the original rectangle, approximately 118'- 6" x 42'- 6", and the later trapezoid-shaped addition on the south. The base of the trapezoid, parallel to but projecting slightly from the east face of the main rectangle, measures 80'- 5". The opposing wall on the west measures 81'- 4" is set back and angles southeast from the west face of the main rectangle. The side contiguous to the main rectangle measures 36'- 0" while the opposing wall measures 14'- 0". In addition, a low circular unroofed structure with a 10'- 10" diameter connects to a bay immediately left and south of the center bay of the original rectangle.

Major walls of the casemates are typical cut sandstone blocks set in a lime mortar. Brick vaults begin springing from these walls approximately 4'- 0" above the floor line. The walls of the addition and the enclosure of the porticos are of brick masonry. The walls are finished with several distinct coats of smooth lime plaster. The west wall of the casemates was replastered with portland cement stucco by the U.S. Army in 1940.

All the doorways on the east facade, except the two northernmost, are framed with simple projected brick surrounds, plastered but no molding or decoration. All other doorways are flush openings with no surround or trim. The wood doors fall into two distinct date groups. All doors of the original casemates are recent vertical boards with modern hardware. Doors of the addition, of a much earlier date, consist of louvered and solid panels in combination.

On the east facade there is a single masonry opening into the present transformer room. The north facade has a single iron barred window with a flush opening and shutters made of vertical boards. On the south wall there are two small, high, iron barred openings without shutters. In contrast, the five windows in the west wall of the casemates are treated with carved stone frames and sill support. The slightly rounded heads are framed with dog-ears. Immediately below each sill is a small ornamental plaque of strapwork design. There are fixed horizontal wood louvers in the upper section of the windows and vertical wood shutters below. In the west wall of the addition, the window openings are flush, and the majority have wood shutters. In addition there is an iron-barred grill in the southernmost window, and the adjacent window has been closed up to accommodate a window air-conditioning unit, since removed.

The roofs over both the original section and the 1861 addition are relatively flat with a slight slope from west to east necessary for water drainage into brick gutters. The surface of the roof over the casemates is flat brick which was mopped with asphalt at one time.

The construction beneath this surface has not been determined. The roof of the addition is a modern 3" concrete slab and beam system installed by the U.S. Army in 1940. The surface is covered with red quarry tile.

The parapet walls along the perimeter of the roof vary in height and treatment. The highest is on the west, rising 6'- 0" above the roof. It continues around the north and south end walls of the casemates, terminating in descending scrolls at a point approximately midway over the gallery. There is an intermediate parapet at the junction of the casemate roof and the slightly lower roof of the gallery. The east wall of the gallery also terminates in a parapet approximately 1'- 0" above the roof.

There are cornices on both the east and west facades. On the east facade there is a cornice on both the casemate section and the 1861 addition, however, the cornice on the casemates is slightly higher than the cornice on the later addition. On the west facade the cornice is part of a full entablature at the casemates, but there is no cornice on the addition.

The plan consists of two distinct blocks: the original casemates and the 1861 addition. The casemates are essentially five vaulted rectangular rooms with typical measurements of approximately 17'- 10" x 25'- 6", separated by sandstone walls varying from 4'- 0" to 4'- 4" thick. In front of and perpendicular to these is a lower vaulted and enclosed gallery, 11'- 0" x 105'- 7", however, the most southern bay has been sealed with masonry. On the north there are two very small rooms. The middle and the extreme south casemates are divided transversely by masonry partitions. All casemates are interconnected axially by low arched openings except between the first and second casemates on the north which was sealed in 1861. Access to the gallery from each casemate is through a wide arched opening. At present, only two of these openings have doors, which are louvered. There is a single window opening in the west wall of each casemate, closed with double vertical board shutters. The first casemate on the north connects to one of the small rooms on the north and the last casemate on the south connects to the first bay of the 1861 addition. Access from the enclosed gallery to the Plaza de Armas on the east is by double doors in each bay except the second bay from the south which opens directly to the unroofed circular officers' bath which is 13'- 0" in diameter.

The 1861 addition consists of five unequal bays separated by masonry walls varying from 1'- 4" to 2'- 2" in thickness. The first bay adjacent to the casemates is 13'- 10" wide and subdivided transversely into 3 irregularly shaped rooms by partial partitions. The middle room contains shower, while there is a toilet in the small room on the west, with two small windows on the western wall.

The small room on the east side opens to the Plaza de Armas. The adjacent bay, 10'- 10" wide, is subdivided into a toilet room with a window on the west and a room with urinals and lavatories on the east. This room also opens to the Plaza de Armas. The middle bay is 13'- 9" wide and also subdivided into a shower room with a window on the west. The room on the east is a dressing room with a door to the Plaza de Armas. The next adjacent bay to the south, 10'- 11" wide, was used by the U.S. Army for a lie detector room, and presently all surfaces including doors and window are covered with acoustical tile, which is quite damaged. The fifth and last bay on the south is 17'- 2" wide, divided longitudinally into a toilet room with plywood enclosures on the south and the entrance room with two urinals. Immediately adjacent to this bay on the south exterior is a very recent galvanized iron shed housing a masonry incinerator. On the lower level, directly under the casemates, are five cisterns which measure in plan approximately 17'-1" x 55'-0". The west wall of the cisterns sets back 13'- 0" from the west exterior facade of the casemates and the east wall of the casemates project under the Plaza de Armas approximately 35'- 0" from the east exterior face of the gallery. There are two straight flights of masonry steps without handrails leading down to the extreme north and south cisterns, the floor which is 31'- 6" below the casemate floor. Access to the stairs is through doorways set in the west exterior wall of the cisterns.

The floors in all the casemates, except the 4th from the north, are modern Portland cement, scored and unscored. Red clay tile is used in the 4th casemate. Also, in the front room of the middle casemate there is a narrow tile strip running from the east doorway to the opposite doorway on the west. It is 31" wide and patterned in grey, blue and red tiles. In the niche in casemate 2 from the north, formed when the opening to the north casemate adjacent was bricked in, there is brick paving approximately 1½" below the adjacent concrete floor. In the gallery, the floors are modern concrete finishes with the exception of black and white marble in a checkerboard pattern in the first bay on the north and red clay tile is used in the north half of the adjacent bay. The marble tile is approximately 2" below the level of the brick paving in casemate 2 and approximately 3½" below the tile in casemate 4. In the 1861 addition, all floors are red clay tile with the exception of a Portland cement finish in the first bay adjacent to the casemates.

Several coats of lime plaster are found on the sandstone walls and the vaulted brick ceilings. Undercoats consist of lime and clay plaster. Large areas of plaster are damaged in both the casemates and the gallery. The wall finishes in the addition are sound.

The arched openings between the casemates and the gallery are 5'-6" wide and 10'-10" high. The area above the transom bar is filled with wood louvers except in the north casemate which has been closed off with wood studs and plaster. There are no doors at these openings except in the two southernmost. Here there are four-leafed louvered panel doors. There are no doors in the arched openings between the casemates, although existing wood frames in some indicate former doors. A vertical iron-bar gate connects the north casemate with the adjacent small room on the north, and a 3-panel wood door connects the south casemate with the addition. Other than double-acting half doors in the middle bay, there are no doors on the interior of the 1861 addition.

PREPARER UNKNOWN:

DATE UNKNOWN:

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Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

1994

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